29 January 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

STAT   FROM:

Director, Intelligence Community Staff

SUBJECT: Project SAFE

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STAT   1. I was in [   ] on 15 January to talk with representatives of [   ] and the Consolidated SAFE Project Office. [   ] was there at the   STAT
same time. Our visit was stimulated by surprise at the last SAFE Steering
Committee meeting. At that meeting it became clear that SAFE was not doing
as well as I thought it had been and that it had been faltering for some time.
The trip was intended to indicate to [   ] that we care and to get   STAT
a better understanding of the project status.

STAT   2. The thrust of [   ] to us was that SAFE is "back on
track." I walked away from that meeting hopeful, but not certain. It is
clear that they had been floundering. They had undertaken a basic approach
to the software design that turned out to be a blind alley. By their own
account, they wasted six months on that error. It is hard to understand
why they would have taken an approach that they understood to be risky and
innovative without anything going on in parallel to back it up. Having
discovered that, they have taken a number of steps: They fired the top
management and replaced them. They got the development into a PERT system.
They rescheduled. The new management team looks pretty good, but ritual
beheadings at this stage of a software development project are, I understand,
standard practice. The rescheduling and PERT management will enable us to tell
in the future if the development is off the tracks, but may not significantly
increase the probability that it will go well.

3. Three main concerns were left over at the end: (1) whether the
performance of the system will be good enough to give the user response times
required and whether the simulations they are developing are satisfactory to
estimate performance characteristics; (2) the characteristics of the user
language; and (3) failure and recovery modes for the system.

4. They argue that performance and recovery modes are simply issues in which you invest time and money tweaking the development. They are not fundamentally concerned about them. They agreed that the user language definition had dragged on for too long, but that it was going to be resolved by the end of January.

5. Al and I both left somewhat encouraged but still skeptical. Last week I learned through [ ] and then from [ ] in OCR that the user language negotiations had revealed a major problem. The user language people on [ ] staff had been dealing with the language people [ ] and the two had been proceeding toward a reasonable resolution of some difficult issues. This month the system development group [ ] came in and laid on the table what they were doing. It was utterly disconnected from the other discussions and was regarded by [ ] and a host of others as completely unsatisfactory. There was a session on this last week [ ] the results of which I do not know.

6. I am not certain what we can do to improve the communication between people who are competent to define the user language and the system developers. It may require people from [ ] shop to go out and live [ ] for a while. In any event, I am going to propose to [ ] that we make the Steering Group sessions much more substantive. In particular, I will propose that we follow the schedule as PERTed from meeting-to-meeting and that the March meeting address how the performance simulation, recovery, and user language issues have been resolved.

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cc: D/OPBC/ICS
     Chairman, IHC